

Food Catering Requirements:

I would like to open a catering business. What do I need to know?

1. Do I need a food facility license to operate a catering business?

Yes. A food facility license is required to operate a catering business. This license is obtained from the Washington County Environmental Health Department.

2. Do I need any special facilities or equipment?

Yes. Catering operations require a commercially-equipped kitchen that meets the requirements of Maryland Food Code (*COMAR Regulations 10.15.03*). Domestic kitchens and residential equipment cannot be approved.

3. Am I allowed to cater out of my home?

Yes, with exceptions. A catering business may operate out of your home, but only if it complies with specific COMAR regulations:

- **Plan Review:** The plan review is conducted to determine if the facility is properly designed and equipped, *and* if food preparation and storage facilities are completely separated from your living quarters as per the Maryland *COMAR Regulations 10.15.03*.
- **Licensure:** In addition, a food establishment license is required to operate a catering business. This license is obtained from the Washington County Health Department.

4. What exactly does “separated from my living quarters” mean?

“Living or sleeping quarters located on the premises of a food facility . . . shall be separated from rooms and areas used for food facility operations by complete partitioning and solid self-closing doors.” The family kitchen cannot be used for catering, and the catering facility cannot be used as the family kitchen. The two must be separate and distinct.

Food may be served at a location other than the caterer's licensed food service facility if the caterer and location complies with COMAR 10.15.03 subsections §.01—§.14, §.15A(3-8), §.18I and §.18L.

5. Is it possible to rent or lease a facility that is already equipped for food service?

Yes. Many caterers have an arrangement with a facility that is already licensed as a food facility. Before signing any documents, arrange for an inspection by the health department to determine if the facility is in compliance with the Maryland Food Code and can be licensed for additional catering activities. The catering business must obtain a separate license for each location where food preparation and storage occurs.

6. Do I need a special vehicle and equipment for transporting food?

Yes. A vehicle with a smooth and cleanable interior must be provided for transporting food. Potentially hazardous food items must be maintained at proper temperatures. Hot food items must be maintained at 140° F or above and cold food items at 40° F or below. In order to maintain proper temperatures, insulated or electrical hot and cold food-holding containers must be used and they must comply with the requirements of the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF).

Maryland COMAR 10.15.03 Regulations and all applications can be found on our website:

<http://health.maryland.gov/washhealth>

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